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S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 003751

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TAGS: PGOV PINR CB  
SUBJECT: FURTHER EVIDENCE OF HUN SEN'S MENTAL STATE

REF: PHNOM PENH 3720

¶11. (S) SUMMARY. SECOND PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN HAS CALLED FOR A FORMAL RCG INVESTIGATION INTO A REPORT, PUBLISHED BY A LOCAL NEWSPAPER, OF A PLOT TO ASSASSINATE HIM. THE REPORT, SOURCED TO FUNCINPEC SECRETARY-GENERAL SIRIVUDH, IS MOST LIKELY LITTLE MORE THAN UNFOUNDED RUMOR, POSSIBLY FLOATED BY THE SOMETIMES MISCHIEVOUS SIRIVUDH TO PROVOKE A REACTION FROM HUN SEN, WHO CONTINUES TO SHOW A NEAR-OBSSESSION WITH HIS PERSONAL SECURITY (REFTEL). END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) THE NOVEMBER 11 ISSUE OF "NEW ANGKOR" NEWSPAPER CONTAINED A STORY ABOUT A POSSIBLE PLOT BY UNNAMED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO ASSASSINATE SECOND PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN AS HE TRAVELED TO THE NEARBY HUN SEN DEVELOPMENT ZONE OR VISITED THE ROYAL PALACE (WHERE HIS BODYGUARDS USUALLY REMAIN OUTSIDE). FUNCINPEC PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL AND FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER PRINCE NORODOM SIRIVUDH, WHO, THE ARTICLE SAID, REVEALED THE PLOT TO THE PAPER, SUBSEQUENTLY DENIED THAT HE KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT IT. THREE DAYS LATER, HUN SEN DESCRIBED THE ALLEGED PLAN IN A SPEECH AT A MILITARY TRAINING CENTER NEAR PHNOM PENH, NOTING THAT THE ATTEMPT WOULD OCCUR IN APRIL, 1996. HE DID NOT SPECULATE WHO WAS BEHIND THE PLOT.

¶13. (S) CO-INTERIOR MINISTER YOU HOCKRY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR DURING A NOVEMBER 14 FAREWELL LUNCH THAT HUN SEN WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE REPORT AND HAD, WITH FIRST PRIME MINISTER RANARIDDH'S CONSENT, REQUESTED A FORMAL RCG INVESTIGATION. HE SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED THAT HOCKRY, RATHER THAN HIS CPP COLLEAGUE AND SOMETIMES PERCEIVED RIVAL, CO-INTERIOR MINISTER SAR KHENG, HEAD THE GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE.

¶14. (S) HOCKRY ALSO OBSERVED THAT EVEN BEFORE THE ASSASSINATION RUMOR HUN SEN HAD BEEN ACTING MORE CONCERNED ABOUT HIS SECURITY. WHEN, FOR EXAMPLE, HE TRAVELS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, HE TAKES ABOUT 60 BODYGUARDS WITH HIM--MORE THAN ANY OTHER OFFICIAL. (BY WAY OF COMPARISON, HOCKRY SAID HE TAKES SIX PERSONS AND SAR KHENG UP TO FORTY.) AFTER "NEW ANGKOR" PUBLISHED THE ASSASSINATION STORY, HUN SEN CUT SHORT HIS VISIT TO SIEM REAP AND FLEW BACK TO PHNOM PENH; IN A DEPARTURE FROM HIS NORMAL ROUTINE, HE ASKED THAT HIS HELICOPTER PICK HIM UP DIRECTLY FROM HIS HOTEL, ACCORDING TO HOCKRY.

¶15. (S) IN A POSSIBLY RELATED MATTER, FOREIGN MINISTER UNG HUOT ASKED THE AMBASSADOR AT A FAREWELL DINNER ON NOVEMBER 13 WHETHER THE USG HAD ANY INFORMATION ABOUT A POSSIBLE ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT IN THE NEXT MONTH OR TWO. HE CLAIMED THAT THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT WAS "AWARE" OF THE INFORMATION. THE AMBASSADOR INFORMED HUOT THAT HE KNEW NOTHING OF THE REPORT.

¶16. (S) COMMENT: SIRIVUDH ONCE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE DELIBERATELY MADE PROVOCATIVE STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS IN ORDER TO ELICIT REACTIONS FROM PEOPLE AND THEN ASSESS WHERE THEY

TRULY STAND ON ISSUES. HE DENIED INFORMING THE LOCAL PAPER OF THE ALLEGED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT, BUT WE WOULD NOT PUT IT PAST HIM SINCE HE HAS DONE SIMILAR THINGS IN THE PAST. IN ANY EVENT, HUN SEN HAS BEEN PROVOKED INTO REACTING, AND HIS REACTION IS IN KEEPING WITH HIS INCREASED CONCERN, SOME HERE CALL IT PARANOIA, ABOUT HIS PERSONAL SECURITY (REFTEL). IN OUR VIEW, RUMORS SUCH AS THIS ARE NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY HERE, AND THE STORY PROBABLY HAS LITTLE OR NO BASIS IN FACT.

TWINING